Fisheries and Oceans Canada | Pêches et Océans Canada

Bowhead Whale

Eastern Canada - West Greenland population

Consultations on listing under the *Species at Risk Act*

The Eastern Canada/ West Greenland population of **Bowhead Whale** has been assessed as "special concern" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Before deciding whether this species will be protected under the *Species at Risk Act*, Fisheries and Oceans Canada would like your opinion, comments and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural and economic impacts of listing or not listing it.

Please provide your input by **March 15, 2015.**

Photo credit:
J. Higdon, Fisheries and Oceans Canada

The Bowhead Whale (*Balaena mysticetus*) is a large baleen whale in the Balaenidae family. Other common names include the Greenland Whale, Greenland Right Whale and Polar Whale. In northern Aboriginal languages, it is known as Arviq or Arvik (Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun), Agkhovik (Inupiat), Akhgvopik (Yupik) and Ittiv (Chukchi). It has a barrel-shaped body with a massive head and a large arched mouth. This thick skull and powerful body allow it to smash up to 20 cm of ice to create breathing holes. Calves are 4 to 4.5 m long at birth and brownish black in colour, while adults are black with white areas near the chin, eyelids, flipper insertions, ano-genital area, tail stock and flukes.

The extent of the Eastern Canada – West Greenland population is roughly one million km^2. Bowhead Whales from this population summer in western Baffin Bay, the Canadian High Arctic, northern Foxe Basin and northwestern Hudson Bay. Wintering occurs in areas with unconsolidated pack ice such as northern Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait, central Davis Strait, southern Baffin Bay, and offshore West Greenland.

Proposed listing under SARA: Special Concern

Bowhead Whales in the eastern Arctic were originally assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in 2005 as a Threatened species with two populations. In 2009, the Eastern Canada-West Greenland population was re-assessed by COSEWIC as a single population of "Special Concern".

If listed as Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act*, a management plan will be developed.

The purposes of the *Species at Risk Act* are to prevent the disappearance of wildlife species, to provide for their recovery and to encourage the management of special concern species

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has the mandate to conduct assessments on the status of wildlife species and categorize them according to their level of risk for extinction (extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened, or special concern).

The Government of Canada considers scientific evidence, comments received from Canadians during consultations, and potential socio-economic impacts before making a decision whether or not to include the species on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA.

Recovery planning is undertaken for all listed species, and prohibitions are put in place protecting species assessed as extirpated, endangered or threatened.

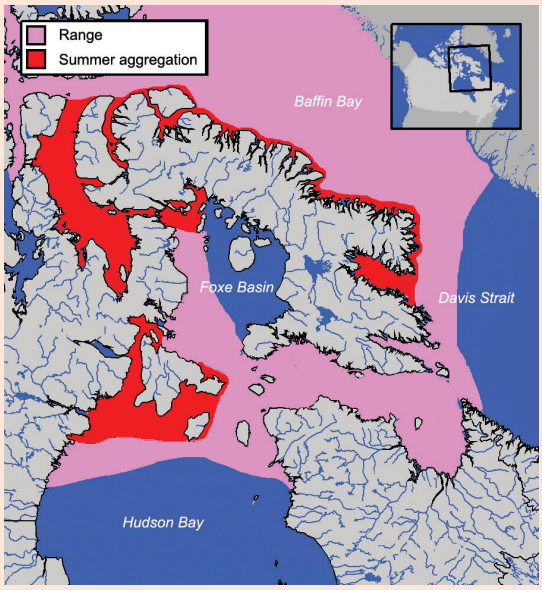
The consultation process

The Government of Canada would like to hear your input on listing the Eastern Canada - West Greenland population of Bowhead Whale as special concern under the *Species at Risk Act*, and any comments on the potential positive and negative impacts this listing would have on you, your industry, your community and/or the ecosystem.

To provide your input, or request a meeting, contact us at lep-sara-qc@dfo-mpo.gc.ca or go to SARAregistry.gc.ca Your answers will be used to help inform the decision whether or not to list the species.

Threats

Commercial whaling was once the greatest threat to the Bowhead Whale and the main reason why the species is at risk in parts of its range. While commercial harvesting is illegal, a small subsistence hunt is permitted.



Other threats may include industrial and manmade underwater noises, net entanglements, collisions with ships, pollution and climate change. Natural predation by Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) may also place pressure on the population.

The population is estimated at 6000. This increase is supported by evidence from Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and science. The population is not yet clearly secure because of its life history (e.g. long generation time, very low natural growth rate).

Special significance of the species

The Bowhead Whale was once an important part of the traditional diet of, and an essential resource for, Inuit peoples. The successful capture of a Bowhead Whale meant food, tools, equipment, shelter, heat and light for a whole community. The whale's blubber was not only an excellent food source, but was also the best source of oil for light and heat. Bowhead rib and jaw bones were used as roof supports, and the vertebrae as blocks for chopping and cutting. Other bones were made into tools and sled runners. The whale's baleen were used to lash together sleds and kayak frames. A limited and well-managed survival hunt has recently been revived in both the eastern and western Arctic under the Nunavut and Inuvialuit Land Claim Agreements. This hunt is limited and carefully managed.

Protection and recovery of species under SARA

Prohibitions listed under SARA legislation ***do not apply*** to species of special concern

Possible management measures

If the Eastern Canada - West Greenland Bowhead whale is listed under SARA as special concern, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will, in collaboration and consultation with stakeholders and partners, use the best available information to develop a management plan for the species. Management plans set goals and objectives for maintaining sustainable population levels of one or more species that are particularly sensitive to environmental factors, but which are not yet considered in danger of becoming extinct.

To submit your comments, please complete the questionnaire or go to the **Species at Risk Public Registry** site under "Get involved"

Canada